

10 APR 1972

STAT

THE PRESS

Protest at the Post

To match its liberal editorial policies, the Washington *Post* has always been a leader among metropolitan dailies in hiring blacks. The blacks on the paper include an editorial writer, a columnist, two assistant city editors, two cultural writers and 14 other reporters and photographers. Of its 393 newsroom employees, including copy boys, clerks and trainees, the *Post* claims a black representation of 40, or more than 10%. At the Los Angeles *Times*, four out of 437 editorial employees are black. Only 22 minority-group members (Spanish speaking, American Indian, Oriental and black) are among the 557 New York and Washington report-

THE WASHINGTON POST



BLACK REPORTERS AT NEWS CONFERENCE
Attacking the plantation.

ers, editors and photographers at the New York *Times*.

Not enough, say seven of the *Post's* black city-desk reporters. After almost two months of talks with management, the "Metropolitan Seven" have filed a formal complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission charging racial bias in the newspaper's assignment and promotion policies. "This discrimination cannot continue to exist at a publication in a city that is 71.1% black," reads the complaint. "The lack of black participation in the shaping of the news reported by one of America's most prestigious newspapers is to us an insult to the black community." Their proposed solution: hire enough blacks within a year to fill 35% to 45% of every editorial category.

For some time blacks on the *Post* have talked about a "plantation" atmosphere in which they felt that they were

getting inferior assignments and unsatisfactory advancement. One of their spokesmen, Richard Prince, has been covering the district's equivalent of city hall. Another, Ivan Brandon, was promoted in the midst of the controversy to assistant city editor, the second black in that position.

Their formal protest began in January with a letter to Executive Editor Benjamin Bradlee. They demanded to know, among other things, why there were no blacks reporting for the sport and financial sections, why there were no blacks in senior executive positions, why there have traditionally been only one or two blacks on the prestigious national staff.

Another grievance concerns the *Post's* coverage of black affairs, which some staffers consider too stereotyped. Says one white reporter: "Pick up the paper any day, and you would think that all the blacks in Washington are either on methadone, are welfare mothers, or are running for Miss Teen-Age Black America."

But that charge and the one accusing the *Post* of discrimination seem overdrawn. The paper frequently runs stories sympathetic to black problems, and articles that treat blacks as individuals. The *Post* supports an all-black intern program at the Washington Journalism Center. The paper also has sent a black editor around the country scouting for black recruits.

Schizophrenia. Bradlee and his colleagues are clearly disturbed by the complaint—and the problem that inspired it. He nonetheless ran an editorial-page piece by Ben Bagdikian about the charges, as well as a column by Nicholas von Hoffman. Both writers were sympathetic to the blacks' position. Wrote Bagdikian: "The failure to place blacks in influential positions in the media is far more than a failure of the journalistic trade; [it is a failure] to reach the consciousness of the rest of a country faced with the prospect of cultural schizophrenia." It was an unusual airing of a paper's internal troubles. "We have not yet been successful," Bradlee says, "in matching our commitment to hire, assign and promote blacks with our commitment to hire, assign and promote the very best journalists we can find to fill the needs we have."

This seems to be Bradlee's polite way of saying that the *Post* has been having a difficult time finding as many qualified blacks as it would like. That is a problem encountered by many large publications that have been trying to go beyond a few token blacks. For a variety of reasons, journalism has not been a profession to which many middle-class blacks have traditionally aspired. Even if the *Post* wanted to meet the demand of 35% to 45% blacks in all editorial categories, it would be unable to

do so without causing an upheaval. Instead, management promoted Brandon, hired two black interns for the local staff and Associated Press Reporter Austin Scott for the national staff. "We hope to be doing more," says Bradlee. This did not satisfy the seven dissidents. They gained the support of 26 other blacks on the paper and went ahead with their formal complaint. At the Washington *Star* last week, black staffers met to consider what action they should bring against their management.

□ □ □

At the *Post's* sister publication, *Newsweek*, management was coping with a different kind of problem. When a friend twitted Osborn Elliott about a recent ad comparing the magazine to George Wallace as a "force to be reckoned with," he came back with a play on a familiar TV commercial: "Please don't squeeze the chairman." Chairman? Indeed. As part of a major executive shuffle, Elliott, 47, is giving up the somewhat ambiguous assignment of editor in chief and president to become *Newsweek's* board chairman. "The business guys," he explained, "thought that I was not spending enough time on the business side." Elliott insists, however, that he will continue to have general supervision over both editorial and business affairs. Kermit Lansner, 49, continues as editor, and will retain control of week-to-week editorial operations.

The thrust of the changes seems to be financial rather than journalistic. Frederick ("Fritz") Beebe, who has been chairman of both the magazine and its parent, the Washington Post Co., keeps his corporate post. Gibson McCabe, 61, who left the presidency last year to become vice chairman, steps back up into his former job. Robert Campbell, 54, moves up from executive vice president to publisher. Campbell replaces Harry Thompson, 51, who had served as publisher for just a year and is evidently being moved aside; as the new vice president for staff affairs, he will assist Elliott in running a number of subsidiary operations.

Suffering. What are the moves all about? Like many magazines, *Newsweek* has been suffering at the cash register. The recession, the postal rate increase and Phase II have driven advertising and earnings down. The magazine's pretax profit hit an alltime high of \$6,515,000 in 1969, dropped to \$2,584,000 in 1970, and recovered slightly last year, to \$2,738,000.* *Newsweek's* contribution to the company's consolidated income fell from one-third to under one-fifth. Business has improved some in recent weeks, but advertising was off by 43 pages (10.9%) in January and February compared with last year, and the first-quarter total is still 42 pages (6.6%) behind 1971.

*The profit figure would have been down again in 1971 were it not for a new bookkeeping method only used in the industry, the system spreads the cost of selling subscriptions over a number of years rather than counting it as one year's expense.